

Knights of Columbus Building
202-204 South Federal Avenue
Mason City
Cerro Gordo County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-127

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17-MASCIT,
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS BUILDING

HABS No. IA-127

Location: The building is located at the southwest corner of South Federal Avenue and Second Street, S.W., Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa. Postal addresses for the building are listed as: 202-204 South Federal Avenue and 5-11 Second Street, S.W. The original building addresses were 302-304 South Main Street and 105-111 West Fourth Street respectively, as Federal Avenue was known as South Main Street and Second Street, S.W. was known as West Fourth Street prior to 1916.

Present Owner: Wolf Realty, Incorporated of Mason City, Iowa.

Present Occupants: Ground floor occupants are the Golden Rule at South Federal Avenue and the Edel Music Company at the Second Street S.W. The second floor houses The Yellow Door art gallery and the owner-artist's apartment and another apartment tenant.

Present Use: A retail clothing store occupies the ground floor at South Federal Avenue and most of the basement. The rear of the basement houses the boiler room. A jukebox sales and service concern occupies the ground floor at Second Street, S.W. The second floor houses a combination art gallery-artist residence and there is another occupied apartment. Two other apartments are vacant. The third floor and the penthouse are vacant.

Significance: The building exhibits the simple lines of the so-called "Commercial Style." It shows a Prairie School influence with emphasis on strong horizontal lines and exterior usage of brick and terra-cotta. The decorative terra-cotta work is reminiscent of Louis Sullivan inspired ornamentation. The structure was an important mixed-use building in Mason City and the first to be originally built as a lodge hall for the Knights of Columbus in Mason City, Iowa.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1911-12. The construction contract was awarded on July 29, 1911, and ground broken on September 6, 1911.
2. Architect: John N. O'Connor.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The building site was purchased by, and the building ownership for the construction contract listed as, the Knights of Columbus Building Company. The Building Company was established as the agent for the Knights of Columbus Council No. 1006 of Mason City, Iowa (referred to as the K.C. herein). The principal officers of the Building Company were Cornelius O'Keefe, President; E.G. Dunn, Vice President; Edward O'Keefe, Secretary; and Fred Colloton, Treasurer. Previously the K.C. was located at 509 South Main Street (now 409 South Federal Avenue).

In 1950 the Knights of Columbus sold the building to Wolf Realty, Incorporated. Wolf still owns the building. After the sale, the K.C. rented space in the building and then moved out for a brief time to a location on North Federal Avenue. In 1954 the K.C. moved back into their old space until they moved, in late 1961, to a new building they built on Highway 18 at the western fringes of Mason City.

The building occupies the north 44 feet of Lots 1 and 2 in Block A of Paul Felt's Plat.

4. Contractor: C.E. Atkinson of Webster City, Iowa. Atkinson had a low bid of \$40,000 but the construction contract was awarded to Atkinson at cost plus ten percent.
5. Alterations and additions: The major exterior alterations were the ground floor storefront "modernization;" removal of a suspended decorative marquee from the Second Street, S.W. entrance to the upper stories; addition of projecting signs; and, removal of a rooftop terrace which had trellis work and brick piers with necessary accompanying roof modifications.

The major interior alterations occurred in the two apartments on the front part of the second floor. These involved remodeling and modernizations which were performed by D.P. Ryan, contractor, ten to twenty years ago. Electrical work and some plumbing work updating on a piecemeal basis are the other major interior changes. The mezzanine in one of the Second Street, S.W. stores appears to be a later addition of somewhat makeshift construction. The boiler was converted from coal to gas fuel about ten years ago.

- B. Historical Context: The building was the first one owned by the Mason City Knights of Columbus Council No. 1006. To celebrate its completion and its importance as a large and progressive facility, the Knights of Columbus held their 1913 state convention in Mason City at the building. The Knights of Columbus used the third floor and penthouse as a lodge hall for about 48 years. The second floor rental apartments and ground floor store rental space housed many people and businesses over the years. The original tenant of the main store space fronting on South Federal Avenue was the Clover Leaf Hardware Store. After the Knights of Columbus moved from the building for the final time, the third floor was used by the Mason City Little Theater for their performances until 1974.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is an example of a mixed-use building for a smaller Iowa city. It originally featured spaces for a fraternal organization owner (K.C.) on the upper stories, rental income spaces of apartments on the second floor, and stores on the ground floor. For its period, the building design was advanced with usage of simplified "Commercial Style" with some Prairie School overtones.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building above the ground floor stone watertable measures 145'-8" long by an overall width of 44'-10" at the rear. The exterior wall appears as approximately 6-1/2 bays long by 2-1/3 bays wide. The building has a full basement, a ground floor with several small mezzanines, second floor, third floor with a small mezzanine, and penthouse. The overall height of the main facade fronting on South Federal Avenue is approximately 46 feet above the ground floor level at Second Street S.W.
2. Foundations: The basement foundation walls are of brick covered with 7/8 inch hard coat plaster in most of the store areas.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The street facades are of a handsome, dark red face brick with warm, cream color terra-cotta string banding, cornice, and parapet coping. There is a stone watertable base on the street facades. The rear wall and shared party wall are of common brick with clay tile coping. The exterior walls may have a structural clay tile backup since the masonry walls of the penthouse and the parapet have structural clay tile backing (all other exterior walls are covered with plaster finish on the interior so backup material cannot be observed).

In addition to the major masonry walls of the building, there is a penthouse which is finished with stucco on metal lath applied over structural clay tile. The exterior at the major ground floor store fronting on South Federal Avenue has been remodeled with applied cladding of porcelain enamel panels.

4. Structural system, framing: Despite the exterior elevation treatment of bays expressing skeleton framing, the building utilized load-bearing wall construction with limited usage of skeletal framing. It was built to be a fireproof building which was part of the initial program requirements. Except

for beams and round, steel pipe columns at the front store windows, the masonry exterior walls of the building are load bearing east of the Second Street S.W. entrance to the upper stories. West of this entry, the exterior walls are supplemented by columns which are introduced to carry the major beams of the third floor assembly hall and the clear-span window openings of the rear ground floor stores. The interior columns and beams are of concrete. Major longitudinal beams running most of the length of the building are on all floors, except above the grand lodge hall. These beams divide the building width into two structural bays. One-way concrete joists, with cellular structural clay tile between the joists and with concrete floor topping, span between the longitudinal beams and the perimeter masonry walls. Wood trusses, with wrought-iron tension rods, clear-span the gymnasium end of the penthouse; conventional 2" x 8" wood ceiling and roof rafters at 16 inches on-center are used for the remainder of the penthouse. A small, low attic storage area between the penthouse gymnasium and the outer wall has a flat roof supported by 2" x 4" wood rafters at 16 inches on-center. The original rooftop terrace areas are now "flat" roofed and pitched to roof drains. These roof areas are raised above the penthouse floor and appear to utilize a "false" deck, probably of wood, over the typical floor structure of concrete joists, clay tile filler, and concrete topping.

The basement has covered areaways that extend beyond the building under the sidewalks. These areaways have concrete beams supporting a concrete flat slab. The concrete slab is part of the public sidewalk at grade.

5. Balcony and fire escape: There is a steel fire escape at the rear of the building. It is of open grating type supported on brackets attached to the building walls. The lowest section is a counter-balanced drop ladder to grade. A steel balcony, similar in design, to the fire escape, is located at the third floor facing South Federal Avenue.
6. Chimneys: There is one large brick chimney, located at the extreme southwest corner of the building, which rises approximately 24 feet above the roof.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The rear ground floor stores have wood entrance doors while the front store facing South Federal Avenue has newer aluminum storefront doors. The Second Street S.W. entrance to the upper stories has a pair of wood doors. Most of the ground floor doors have single-pane window panels. The doors to the third floor balcony are wood with eight-window lights and with a six-window light transom. The exit to the fire escape at the third floor is a panel door that has been clad over with plywood on the inside face.

- b. Windows: Except for the ground floor, all windows in the building are double-hung, wood windows with undivided lower sash and upper sash of multi-divided window lights. The ground floor has store windows of wood and painted metal at the stores along Second Street S.W. and newer aluminum storefront windows at South Federal Avenue. Fixed wood, 16 light, windows are mounted high in the north wall of the front, major store.
8. Roof: The main roof is "flat" with built-up tar and gravel roofing. Drainage is by roof drains and interior drain lines. The penthouse has a gable roof with a masonry parapet at the rear and party walls. The gable roof has fascia mounted gutters and downspouts.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There is a full basement under the building with basement segments extending beyond the property line under the public sidewalks. Most of the basement is used as sales and storage for the major, ground floor store facing South Federal Avenue. In the rear a partition separates the basement store space from the boiler room. A door in the partition between the boiler room and store is locked and barricaded.
- b. Ground floor: The ground floor has a major store fronting on South Federal Avenue. A small, low ceiling mezzanine, used as office space, is located in the center of the floor, on the south side of the building. A stair down to the basement is located near and to the left of the store entry doors. An entry lobby and stair to the upper stories are located in the center of the floor, on the north side of the building. Three storefronts with separate entryways are located in the rear of the building and face Second Street. These stores have partition walls with doorways. There is a small mezzanine at the rear of two of the stores. A stairway and rear entrance to the alley is located at the extreme southwest corner of the building.
- c. Second floor: The main stairway from the Second Street entry lobby essentially divides the second floor into two halves. Towards the front of the building on the east are two apartments which are now an artist's studio, gallery, and living quarters with a variety of different rooms and uses. Towards the rear of the building are three small apartments reached via a corridor along the south wall connecting the main stair with the rear stair to the alley. These apartments are intact and each has a bedroom, a living-dining area, kitchen, bath, and closets. All of the bathrooms have raised floors.

- d. Third floor: The third floor was the main lodge space for the Knights of Columbus. The main stair from the Second Street entry leads to third floor outer hall. Around this hall are grouped doors that led to various fraternity spaces. To the front of the building was an inner "lobby" which doubled as a serving room for special events. This lobby contained a billard hall, parlor, reading room, ladies parlor, toilets, kitchenette, coatroom, and circulation areas to connect all of the fraternity spaces. Towards the rear of the building is a large assembly hall. A small mezzanine with dressing rooms, toilets, and projection booth was reached via a small stair from the assembly hall. The third floor is now completely vacant and unused.
 - e. Penthouse: A penthouse is located in the rear section of the roof. The building contained a gymnasium with locker rooms and toilet rooms and was a part of the Knights of Columbus lodge facility. Access was by a narrow stair from the third floor inner lobby. There was a roof terrace in the front section of the roof.
2. Stairways: A wide concrete stair provides interior circulation between the basement and ground floors of the major store fronting on South Federal Avenue. All other stairs throughout the building are metal pan construction with concrete fill treads and steel channel stringers. The main stair and the rear stair have decorative ironwork balusters and heavy decorative newel posts.
 3. Elevator shaft: A shaft for an elevator was part of the original construction. However, an elevator was not installed as a cost savings and anticipated future installation never materialized. The elevator was intended to serve the lodge hall. The shaft begins at the ground floor and extends to the penthouse. No door openings were provided although the shaft interior is visible at the penthouse.
 4. Flooring: The basement floor is poured concrete. The ground floor stores have hardwood floors on sleepers over concrete. The mezzanines have wood floors. The entry lobby has ceramic tile flooring laid in a decorative border pattern. The second floor apartments have concrete floors with some areas of newer applied asphalt tile and carpeting. The third floor has hardwood flooring on sleepers over the structural slab. The third floor mezzanine has concrete floor slabs. The penthouse has hardwood flooring on sleepers over concrete in the gymnasium and exposed concrete floors in the adjacent toilet and locker room spaces.

5. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster is used throughout the building for wall and ceiling finish. Hard coat plaster is applied over all surfaces in the basement. Third floor assembly hall has coffered ceilings.
6. Doorways and doors: Wood panel doors and wood frames and trim are used throughout the building. Except for the third floor Knights of Columbus space, which still retains much of the natural wood finish, doors and frames have been painted.
7. Trim: Wood bases were used throughout the building where there are wood floors. Wood chair rails are used in public corridors and many of the store spaces. The third floor lodge spaces make extensive use of wood for chair rails, ceiling moldings, map rails, and batten strips over wall surfaces in the inner lobby and some of the other small rooms. The inner lobby on the third floor has false beam work of warm wood as a decorative feature.
8. Built-ins: Built-in work is at a minimum. Original kitchen cabinet work, all of painted wood, survive in the lodge hall kitchenette and kitchens of three apartments.
9. Hardware: Hardware is simple and basic although some door knobs at the third floor lodge hall have decorative work.
10. Skylights and borrowed light: Certain areas of the building used natural light for illumination. Skylights were located in the gymnasium roof of the penthouse and a small skylight with light well was placed at one end of the third floor inner hall. Windows that borrowed light from exterior windows or from other spaces were utilized. High windows, now painted over, were located in the shared walls between the front, main store and the first store on Second Street S.W. beyond the upper floor entry lobby. Windows were in the interior walls of the apartments such as the apartment wall to the corridor and bathrooms. Other borrowed light windows were in the penthouse toilet areas.
11. Lighting: There are modern fluorescent ceiling lights in the ground floor stores, second floor front apartment and art gallery, portions of the basement, and portions of the third floor. New incandescent lighting was installed in the large assembly hall on the third floor. Original incandescent lighting survives in scattered locations throughout the building with concentration of surviving fixtures on the third and penthouse floors. Most of the surviving light fixtures are of ceiling mounted, hung pendant variety. Some of these have molded cylindrical globes of frosted glass. The penthouse gymnasium has fixtures with four bare incandescent bulbs on short bracket arms in a cruxiform arrangement supported by a suspended rod and mounting plate to a structural tie beam. There is some use, at scattered locations in the building, of brass wall-mounted fixtures.

12. Heating: The building is heated by steam. The boiler is in the rear of the basement and is gas fired although the fuel originally was coal. Although many downtown buildings in Mason City were heated (until about ten years ago) by central steam heating provided by the power plant, this building always supplied its own heating needs. From the boiler, steam lines branch out through the basement to vertical riser pipes located at the perimeter walls. The risers go through each floor with necessary branches to radiators located near the riser to provide heat for each floor.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The building is on a corner. It faces South Federal Avenue on the east and its long axis runs along Second Street S.W. on the north. The party wall on the south is shared with the Strand Theater (now vacant). The west, or rear, wall faces an alley. Except for a small rear yard which appears to be part of the alley, the building occupies all of its lot. The building is set on a slight slope that follows South Federal Avenue and drops toward Willow Creek, located about a block to the south. The building is in an urban setting of older buildings and, unfortunately, an area now of deterioration and rapid decline.

Prepared by: Ronald E. Schmitt, Architect
Environmental Planning & Research, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois
December 30, 1977

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: Postcard view, circa 1912, from collection of Art Fischbeck of Mason City, Iowa. A photocopy of this postcard is included in this documentation.

Several early partial views of the building taken during the 1913 Knights of Columbus State Convention are on display in the lobby of current K.C. building on Highway 18 West, Mason City, Iowa.

B. Interviews:

Art Fischbeck, 15 East State Street, Mason City, Iowa.

R. J. Klapsaddle, Building Engineer for Knights of Columbus, (new) K.C. building, Highway 18 West, R.R. #1, Mason City, Iowa.

Claude Hewett, Building Engineer for (old) K.C. building, 105 15th Street N.E., Mason City, Iowa.

Harry Nadler, Building Manager, 212 South Federal Avenue, Mason City, Iowa.

George Huber, 1027 Manor Drive, Mason City, Iowa.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Davenport and Associates. Draft for Environmental Impact Statement. Mankato, Minnesota, January, 1976. Page 118.

Division of Historic Preservation, State of Iowa. Preliminary Reconnaissance Survey for Mason City, Iowa. Iowa City, Iowa, 1975.

Environmental Planning and Research, Inc. Architectural Inventory Surveys. Survey form (no. CBD-47) on file at Department of Community Development, Mason City, Iowa, November 5, 1976.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Environmental Planning and Research, Inc. Mason City, Iowa: An Architectural Heritage. Department of Community Development, Ktipto Printing Company, Mason City, Iowa, 1977. Pages 26, 75 and 79.

Mason City Globe Gazette, (newspaper articles) Mason City, Iowa, July 14, 1911, Page 1; July 29, 1911, Page 1; July 31, 1911, Page 8; and September 6, 1911, Page 2.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The architectural recording project of the building was the result of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Iowa State Historic Preservation Officer and the City of Mason City, Iowa in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the redevelopment plan for the City of Mason City. Ronald E. Schmitt, an architect in Chicago, prepared the written documentation. The architectural measured drawings were prepared by Charles A. McCoy, and were based on the information gathered by Mr. Schmitt. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in Washington, D.C. office, edited the written documentation for transmittal to the Library of Congress. Photographer Thomas Yanul of Chicago made the documentary photographs. John A. Burns, AIA, was the HABS coordinator for this project.